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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 001637

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: HAMAS VISIT TO MOSCOW

REF: A. MOSCOW 1323
[1](#)B. MOSCOW

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs
Kirk Augustine, for reasons 1.4 (B & D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. A/DCM met February 17 with MFA Middle East and North Africa Director Sergey Vershinin to follow up on earlier discussion (reftel) on the forthcoming visit of a Hamas delegation to Russia, which will take place March 3.
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END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Timing and Level. Vershinin noted that an MFA announcement had said the Hamas visit would take place "at the beginning of March," but he could not yet provide a specific date. He was confident, however, that it would take place before FM Lavrov's March 6-7 visit to Washington. (Note. In a separate telcon, Russian Middle East envoy Aleksandr Kalugin told Ambassador the Hamas visit was now expected to take place March 3. End Note) A final decision had not yet been taken, Vershinin said, about the level at which the Hamas delegation would be received, but he expected the "substantive" discussions to be led on the Russian side by DFM Saltanov. (Comment. We expect FM Lavrov will also meet with the Hamas delegation, especially in light of the February 16 meeting of Turkish FM Gul with a Hamas delegation led by Khaled Mashaal. End Comment)

[1](#)3. (C) Purpose. Vershinin said Russia would use the visit to present Quartet views to Hamas unequivocally, and would inform the U.S. shortly thereafter of the results of the discussions. He repeatedly stressed the GOR's desire to bring about acceptance by Hamas of a "continuity of Palestinian obligations." Although the Russian mission in Ramallah had had some contacts with Hamas members holding positions in the Palestinian Authority, such meetings had dealt with them as local government officials, not as Hamas representatives. The Moscow visit would provide the first contact between Russia and Hamas "at a decision-making level." Asked whether Russia had consulted with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) about the Hamas visit, Vershinin said only that Abu Mazen was "positive" about the visit.

[1](#)4. (C) Russia did not conceive the forthcoming discussions as "negotiations," but rather as an opportunity to influence internal Hamas thinking towards accepting the continuity of Palestinian obligations. He believed there had already been "many contradictions" in Hamas' approach, and it was now confronting a new reality that would inevitably put more stress on a disparate membership. Many Hamas members were "pragmatists who do not live in the sky." Asked whether the GOR had considered how it would react if initial meetings with Hamas led to no evolution in its positions, Vershinin said Russia was taking a "realistic" approach. Hamas would, at best, not change "overnight." The meeting in Moscow was not a one-off event from which immediate results were expected, but rather the start of a process.

[1](#)5. (C) Assistance. A/DCM noted a February 13 interview with Russian UN Permrep Denisov, who had said that "any ban on the provision of international financial assistance to the

Palestinians would be counterproductive," and asked how such statements related to the Quartet's agreement that future assistance to any new (Palestinian) government would be reviewed by donors" against its commitment to nonviolence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of prior Palestinian obligations. Vershinin said it was not clear yet what the composition or policies of the new Palestinian government would be. It would be up to every donor to review those developments and to determine whether it would stop or reduce its assistance, or differentiate in its humanitarian, financial and military assistance. This was a subject for discussion within the Quartet.

16. (C) Vershinin acknowledged the February 16 public statement of Yuriy Baluyevskiy, Chief of the Russian General Staff, who had said that delivery of military goods would be put on hold until the new Palestinian government was constituted, after which decisions would be made. Vershinin agreed that the provision of any military assistance would "depend on the evolution of the situation" -- and, he added, the views of the Israeli government. Russia would not provide assistance that would undermine Israel's security. (Note. Russian Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov told the press February 17 that "any supply of (military) technology to the Palestinians can be implemented only with Israel's agreement and through its territory." End Note)

17. (C) Comment. Like other GOR officials, Vershinin insisted that Putin's invitation to Hamas was consistent with Quartet undertakings and was intended to promote them. He also stressed that the GOR wants to consult closely with the U.S. as the process goes forward. Referring to the Secretary's forthcoming visit to the Middle East, he said it would be important for Moscow to have a clear understanding of the results of her discussions as the Hamas visit and Lavrov's subsequent trip to Washington approach.

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